

# *Editor's Note*

Welcome to the 2017 edition of *Federal History*. Our contributors collectively provide a multifaceted view of how our federal government has functioned. Their perspectives are wide-ranging—from presidential policy-making, to the often frictional relations between agencies, to the decisive roles of key individuals. Looking beyond the formal constitutional mandates for governing, the authors examine how political maneuvering, popular movements, domestic and international crises, and individual leadership have shaped government policies and actions. While some authors use a traditional political framework, others use untapped oral histories and tools from social science methodologies on group dynamics. They all further our knowledge of particular and inventive ways in which government entities (including the military) executed their roles. Like all federal history work, these articles also offer lessons learned for improved governance. We are grateful that *Federal History* can be part of this essential investigative and deliberative process.

Our first article is the 2016 Roger R. Trask Lecture delivered by Donald A. Ritchie, Historian Emeritus of the Senate. Ritchie discusses select and important moments of his 40-year career as Senate Historian that include researching historical background for bicentennial commemorations and statues, and consultation on the language and content of memorials. He also helped the history office adapt new digital capabilities to make oral history transcripts more widely available online. He recounts how Senate Historian Dick Baker convinced Senator Robert C. Byrd “to introduce a resolution that would automatically open all but the Senate’s most sensitive records after 20 years, and the rest after 50 years”—a momentous boost for historical work. Ritchie’s lecture provides a clear picture of the federal historian’s dual role—promoting both his office history and the effectiveness of his profession by recording oral histories, and improving access to records that will form the basis for future research.

Eric Setzekorn examines President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s “strategic rebalance” of defense policy for the Asia-Pacific region with his Mutual Security Program (MSP) during a dangerous period of the Cold War. In the postwar era, Eisenhower sought to bolster the defense capabilities of Asian nations through military and economic aid, which Congress trimmed with claims of waste and abuse. Setzekorn presents a nuanced analysis of strained congressional-presidential relations, the

subsequent fragmentation of aid responsibilities between the Defense and State Departments, and the often wasteful effects of that decentralization to this day.

W. Raymond Palmer offers a reassessment of the creation of the War Refugee Board by documenting a more central and consequential role for FDR administration General Counsel Oscar Cox. Looking closer at Cox's papers, Palmer finds that Cox was disturbed by U.S. inaction in assistance to Jewish refugees during World War II and State Department mismanagement of that role. Cox took an active, central role to persuade State Department officials, key congressmembers, and Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau to accelerate development of a refugee board. Those actions succeeded in gaining President Franklin Roosevelt's support for a board. Palmer's article also sheds light on the tensions and maneuverings within the executive branch and relations with Congress.

Nancy M. Germano traces the emergence of environmentalism in the Lyndon B. Johnson administration. While Lady Bird Johnson elevated the idea of beautification, LBJ introduced numerous measures, such as the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, that sought to combine conservation of natural areas with "efficient and multiple uses" of land by commercial interests. LBJ adopted the utilitarian New Deal goals of flood control, improvement of navigation, and irrigation, but added conservation policies that would "maintain the chance for contact with beauty." Germano argues that LBJ's new direction helped establish a basis for later environmental priorities that included human health and safety, and protection of wildlife.

Heather M. Haley explores conditions along the exceptionally tense Korean Demilitarized Zone that has divided the Korean peninsula since 1953. Using previously untapped soldiers' testimonies, she is able to gain insight into their high state of alert and the dangers they faced. She also examines the effects of the Army's use of defoliants (little-studied outside of Vietnam) to improve visibility of North Korean movements, dangerous encounters with North Korean guards, and the ultimate ban on defoliants. We thus gain a better understanding of the harsh conditions there and the security compromises the Army accepted when it banned the use of dangerous chemical defoliants.

Eric R. Martell goes to the core of presidential planning and decision-making during the Bay of Pigs crisis in 1961. He examines the national security deliberations and decisions by combining the "lenses" of Graham T. Allison's bureaucratic politics model and Irving Janis's Groupthink Syndrome. Through the first, he finds evidence of CIA control of the facts and protection of its own bureaucratic monopoly and future influence. Martell finds that Kennedy's advisers felt pressure to join the group

consensus and “censored their reservations and stifled their healthy skepticism.” Further, Kennedy did not encourage enough dissension and debate. In the end, the president “did not receive the plan he thought he had approved.” The article’s deep scrutiny of the pre-invasion deliberations and interactions provides a cautionary account of the dangers for modern presidential leadership and how decision-making can go wrong. It is also, as the author urges, a demonstration of how tools from other social sciences can augment our historical methods.

Kenneth C. Wenzel delves into the question of what Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt believed to be the cause of the explosion of the USS *Maine* in Havana Harbor in 1898. He makes a strong case that many Navy officials, including Roosevelt, knew that the storage and spontaneous ignition of bituminous coal in ship bunkers was a frequent and well-documented cause of ship explosions. Wenzel quotes from previously unused documents to show that Roosevelt likely personally accepted coal ignition as the cause but then suppressed his support for the theory of sabotage until after the Sampson Board of Inquiry ruled that a mine was the cause. Roosevelt then actively joined the call for war. The article provides us with an interesting view of the internal departmental divisions on the issue and how Roosevelt navigated through them.

Françoise B. Bonnell, Kenneth Finlayson, David Hanselman, and Richard E. Killblane discuss the challenges of historical research and collecting Army artifacts for interpretive and educational programs directed at today’s soldiers. Army curators and historians face radically new conditions and must now risk working at the war front to collect authentic materials, learn of soldiers’ experiences, and observe tactics and campaigns. The authors also explain their careful work of chronicling and representing Army policy changes, such as the expanded roles of female soldiers. Their account provides a clear and useful look into the special and demanding work of Army historians and curators. Historical accuracy is critical, as their efforts are key to the development of Army doctrine, the training of personnel, and the effectiveness of our fighting forces.

I thank Assistant Editor Judson MacLaury for his careful readings of and recommendations on these texts. My thanks also to our readers for their suggestions. We hope that you enjoy this issue and welcome your continued support and comments.

Benjamin Guterman  
Editor, *Federal History*